

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report 24

January, 1979

Focus on Family Violence part II

Troubled Parents, Battered Children: Support & Intervention

The existence of child abuse challenges our cherished idea that the family guided by parental instinct is the best environment for raising children. Each year many children are killed or injured by their parents. According to Vincent J. Fontana child abuse ranks as one of the most common causes of death among children under 18 months. Abuse of children occurs in all types of families with their varied income and educational levels. Children are victimized by both mothers and fathers.

Physical abuse in its most severe form can cause death. The concept of abuse however covers other means of maltreatment to which children are frequently subjected: physical neglect, emotional abuse and neglect, verbal abuse, and sexual abuse.

Children who survive child abuse generally suffer physical or psychological impairment. Just as the parents who abuse were frequently abused as children, so do the abused children of today grow up to become abusive parents. The violence often is not limited to the family however. There is growing evidence that abused children tend to become the perpetrators of violence in our society. Psychiatrist Shervert Frazier's study of 90 murders showed that all had been victims of brutality as children and many came from homes in which there was an emphasis on guns in their early years.

It is highly debatable to what extent abuse of children is a logical extension of the generally accepted use of physical force in child rearing. Murray Straus, researcher on family violence, has concluded that 90 percent of parents use physical punishment on their children early in childhood. It is worth noting that only when it is a parent punishing a child is it legally permissible for one person to strike another. In any other context hitting a person is called assault. There are hopeful signs that we are coming out of the time when children were seen as property of their parents. As the concept of children's rights becomes more fully developed this "privilege" of parents, to punish physically, may lose its sanction.

This is not to say that physical discipline as practiced by many parents is child abuse. Rather, child abuse can be described as nonaccidental or intentional acts of physical force or acts of omission which injure or destroy a child. The fact that within child-rearing practice there exists a range of violence, much of which society considers legitimate, makes it more difficult to detect abuse. Throughout history people's tolerance for even severe maltreatment of children has allowed it occur and today this continues to be a problem. We must however be concerned about the harsh treatment of children at all levels so that we as a society do not continue to tolerate child abuse.

Difficult decisions exist for the neighbor, friend, teacher or relative of the abused child who must report abuse if she or he suspects it. Nevertheless, because there are laws in all states and provinces which require that suspected child abuse be reported to child welfare authorities we are obligated to become involved. If there are the services to follow up, reporting can be the first step toward recognizing the problem and helping the child and the parents. A key person in recognizing and reporting abuse is the family physician who frequently may have the opportunity to treat unexplained injuries in children.

When abuse occurs a variety of approaches can be used including removing the child from the home in the most severe cases, counselling, volunteer parent aides relating on a one-to-one basis, self-help groups such as Parents Anonymous or Parents in Crisis, phone crisis lines for parents, and practical help such as homemakers, babysitters, and financial aid. All are potential ways of changing the situation in which parents abuse children.

Support for a troubled parent can be as direct and simple as a neighborhood contact. In many cases abusive parents are isolated and could benefit from friendly contacts with listening noncritical individuals. Some parents, aware of their problems, are able to arrange these needed contacts on their own; others need more help. A young mother who was extremely short-tempered with her infant told me that she moved to her present apartment mainly to be near a friend who knows her problems, listens when she is needed and has at times taken care of the baby and told the mother to get away from the baby for several hours. In addition the mother keeps a list of crisis numbers by her phone.

For the social worker whose job it is to intervene into people's lives to protect children there are agonizing decisions. Situations where a wrong decision to leave a child at home or return a child home could be fatal. Decisions about others' lives always have implications beyond the immediate. Recently The Vancouver Sun carried two articles which touched on opposing sides of the dilemma. One was about an investigation into a court action in Ontario where a child who was returned to parents after hospitalization for head injuries died. A report on the incident stated that the child welfare agency responsible had failed to carry out its mandate to protect children. The other article commented on a child in England who was taken into care for what the author considered invalid reasons. She objected to child welfare authorities making decisions about how children are to be raised and concluded that it's not their business. Nevertheless these decisions do have to be made.

Child abuse needs our concern and our involvement. When we open our eyes to child abuse we become aware of our complex emotional reactions. While we are shocked by the image of the battered child and critical of the batterer we at the same time have empathy for the parent who cannot cope. This means that we

must be aware of our own feelings as we become involved. For nonprofessionals and professionals alike there is an enormous task in trying to make up for some of the personal and societal lacks on parenting which cause abuse. If ever a situation calls us to put love into practice, it is in our response to both the abused child and the abusing parent.

Sources used:

- Fontana, Vincent J. Somewhere a Child is Crying. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1973.
- Gil, David G. Violence Against Children. Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Kempe, Henry C., and Helfer, Ray E. Helping the Battered Child and His Family. J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972.
- Van Stolk, Mary. The Battered Child in Canada. McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972.

Alice Klassen, Fort Langley, British Columbia, is a social worker for the Ministry of Human Resources, City of Vancouver.

Suggested Resources

Child Abuse

- Boisuert, M.J. The Battered-Child Syndrome, Social Casework, October 1972
- Elmer, Eliz. Identification of Abused Children, Children, Sept.-Oct. 1963
- Johnson and Marse. Injured Children and Their Parents, Children, July-August, 1968.
- Gill, David G., Violence Against Children, Physical Child Abuse in the U.S.A., Harvard University Press, 1972.
- Helfer, Ray E. and Kempe, Henry. The Battered Child, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968.
- Helfer, R.E. Helping the Battered Child and His Family, J.B. Lippincott, 1972
- Van Stolk, Mary. The Battered Child in Canada, McClelland & Stewart, 1972.

Wife Battering

- Currie, Janet and Gropper, Arlene. A Study of Battered Women, 1977.
- Gelles, R.J. The Violent Home---a study of physical aggression between husbands and wives. Sage Publications, 1974.
- Handbook for Victims of Domestic Violence. Washentaw County Now, 117 Washentaw Ave., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104. 50¢ each.
- Steinmetz, S. and Straus, Murray. Violence in the Family. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1977.
- Van Stolk, Mary. Beaten Women, Battered Children. Children Today. March-April, 1976.
- Warrior, B. and Leghorn, L. "Battered Lives," Black Maria. 1975. Know Inc., P.O. Box 86031, Pittsburg, PA 15221.
- Wife Battering--A layman's guide, information packet, 1977. Women's Issue Program, American Friends Service Committee, 2161 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140. \$3.00 each.

General - Family Violence

- Eekelaar, J.M. and Katz, Sanford N. Family Violence--an inter-disciplinary look at a worldwide problem. Butterworths, 1978.
- Valusek, John E. People are Not for Hitting. McCormick-Armstrong Co. Inc. 3629 Mossman, Wichita, KS 67208.

For a variety of excellent information on family violence and related programs write to: The United Way Task Force on Family Violence, 1625 West 8th Ave., Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada V6J 1T9

What You Can Do

Child Abuse Profile

In the late 60's child abuse was probably first recognized as a family social problem of grave importance in the U.S., Canada and abroad. Since that time great strides have been taken in making society aware of the problem, and developing educational and supportive structures for the public in general and more particularly for those involved.

It is illegal in most Canadian provinces and U.S. states not to report a suspected case of child abuse to welfare offices. Your name will be kept in confidence if reporting is done in good faith.

A short profile of child abuse may help you to recognize it in your contacts.

1. Who abuses -
 - No class distinction--or socio-economic and education levels
 - father and/or mother
 - usually battered as a child
2. Type of child -
 - usually young child
 - unwanted
 - wrong sex
 - special child--difficult, provocative, defiant, sickly
3. Precipitating Factors -
 - crisis or series of crises
 - long illness, crying
 - potential to abuse in parent--sense of aloneness, worthlessness
 - desire for child to fill parents needs not fulfilled
 - frustration with behavior of child
4. Where takes place -
 - at home, anytime
 - often in series
5. Forms of Abuse -
 - physical abuse and neglect
 - emotional abuse, deprivation
 - verbal abuse
 - sexual abuse
6. Child's side effects and symptoms -
 - physical injury--bruises, lacerations, fractures, etc.
 - in need of medical attention--sight, hearing, respiratory
 - apathetic, withdrawn
 - aggressive, destructive, disruptive
 - inadequate dress

- unbathed, undernourished
- tired, lethargic
- habitually truant at school, comes early and loiters after dismissal

Wife Battering Profile

The incidence of women-beating may be as prevalent as child abuse, but has been relatively ignored until the last few years.

Both men and women are assaulters and victims but the overwhelming problem is wife-beating. Conversely statistics show that women and men are equally likely to kill their spouse.

Victims almost always seek help from some source. For a friend or relative of the victim or the assaulter to be of help is difficult because of society's attitude of privacy in regard to marital relations. Shame and guilt, coupled with being emotionally and economically trapped in the relationship, often keep victims in the situation.

1. Who Abuses -
 - all socio-economic and education levels
 - apparent typical marital relationship
 - was an abused child or had abusive parents
 - husband's educational and occupational level lower than wife
 - all ages
2. Type of Women -
 - no typical women
 - repeated victims, often career housewives dependent emotionally and economically
3. Where takes place -
 - at home, at nighttime, on weekends
 - often in a series
4. Precipitating Factors -
 - response to anger, frustration, alcohol
 - stress--financial, marital, family or job
 - extreme jealousy, insecurity, inadequacy
 - learned pattern
5. Victims side effects and symptoms -
 - Trauma--physical injury, emotional scars
 - poor self-image, feelings of guilt
 - dependent
 - isolated, depressed, feelings of hopelessness
 - often on anti-depressants or tranquilizers

Where to Get Help

Check with local community information service, mental or public health offices for available services and organizations.

Possible Services -

- Crisis Line-24 hours
- Women's Emergency Shelter (Transition House)

- Support Group for Men Who Batter Wives--treatment and support group
- Human Resources Agencies
- Pastors--if sympathetic to needs
- Parents in Crisis Society - self-help group for abusing parents
- Parent Aide - trained volunteers who listen, support and help parents
- Parental Stress Line - telephone numbers for parents to call for support and relief when under stress
- Parent Friend Association - sympathetic person to support and listen when coping is difficult and put in touch with community resources
- Crisis Nurseries - take child for respite

Community Action

Take stock of your area, what services are available and what is their mandate.

- Communitate education: Use media (radio, newspaper, community video) for focusing public attention on the problem, services available and identifying needs.
- Initiate high school education programs to sensitize students about the problem of family violence, legislation and treatment approaches.
- Provide pamphlets in waiting rooms of Health Service offices, barbershops and beauty salons.
- Workshops for parents, professionals, police, teachers, and ministers.
- Set up helping groups as listed in the Help list.
- Investigate and suggest new ways for police and the legal system to respond to family violence.
- Set up crisis-lines for counselling and referral.

Congregational Action

Education:

- Sunday School discussion groups
- Seminars
- Special action groups
- Representatives to conferences on the issue
- Educate clergy

Action:

- Provide temporary shelter for battered women and children
- Provide temporary shelter for husband so wives and children can stay in home
- Provide emotional and temporary financial support for battered women who leaves the home situation
- Be available to help husband in dealing with his problem
- Get involved in legislative advocacy for supportive laws
- Plan church conference on issue of family violence
- Funding for related needs

Thanks to Mabel Paetkau, Abbotsford, B.C., who collected material for this and the former issue on Family Violence.

News

WHEATSCAPE PRINTS AVAILABLE

Extras of the "Wheatscape" prints which were given to women who attended the special fellowship meals for women during Mennonite World Conference are available for purchase from MCC Peace Section, Akron, PA 17501. Ethel Abrahams, artist from Hillsboro, Kansas, designed the "Wheatscape" prints specially for this occasion. We are selling the prints for \$1 each, with proceeds going to the Task Force on Women, which is already working on ways to increase women's participation in planning and providing input for the next Mennonite World Conference.

COMING UP IN THE REPORT

Upcoming Task Force Report topics include: women and power; women and health care; Native Mennonite women. Materials for the issue on health care will be written and collected by Dorothy Yoder Nyce, 1603 S. 15th St., Goshen, IN, 46526 and the issue on Native women by Betsy Beyler, 100 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, DC, 20002. You are invited to send your suggestions, concerns, questions relating to these issues to them while the issues are in their planning stages.

JOB AND POSITION OPENINGS

The Task Force continues to be invited to submit names of women who might be nominated or invited to sit on various church-related committees or who might be contacted for conference or MCC-related jobs. Examples of current openings and positions for which suggestions of women candidates have been requested include: The International Mennonite Peace Committee, writers for Forum articles, the Director of Faith and Life Radio and TV for the General Conference, the Mennonite Church Board of Congregational Ministries peace portfolio and the peace secretary position for the Lancaster Conference Peace Committee.

U.S. MINISTRIES POSITIONS OPEN

The Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Ministries Board is inviting candidates to apply for the positions of director and assistant director. Lynn Roth and Beverly Lord respectively are holding these positions and will terminate next summer.

The board will be accepting applications immediately and plans to process them early in 1979. Candidates may send direct inquiries and applications to Lowell Detweiler, Personnel Services, Mennonite Central Committee, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA, 17501.

To qualify for either position the candidate should have a definite commitment to Christ. The board is particularly seeking applications from women and minority persons.

Both jobs will call for administrative skills and experience in Mennonite service programs. The persons need to be acquainted with church organization and be committed to Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. Applicants need to be aware that because of the national scope of the positions, travel will take 30 to 40 percent of their working time.

Vision, creativity, objectivity and calmness pinpoint further characteristics of persons in these jobs. They will also need an ability to follow through on projects. Since both will be dealing with many diverse people, the work will require sensitivity in personal relationships.

Once on the job, the director will be responsible for the overall direction of U.S. Ministries including budget, policy and program plans. The director will coordinate contact and carry out relationships with conference staff and related agencies. This will involve maintaining contact with the U.S. Ministries Board, its chairman and the MCC executive secretary. The director of U.S. Ministries is also responsible for the administration of the Voluntary Service program.

Verbs

Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Goshen, IN, will be editing a successor to the Persons Becoming Packet, which is scheduled for publication later this year. The first Persons Becoming packet was compiled by the Task Force in 1973, and it has been reprinted a number of times since then.

Anna Mary Brubacher, Task Force member from Kitchener, Ontario, has been in contact with the planners of the Mennonite Church General Assembly, scheduled for 1979. She has emphasized the Task Force desire to see a leadership training workshop for women as part of the Assembly, as well as for women to serve in leadership roles at the Assembly. She reported that Emma Richards, co-pastor of the Lombard Mennonite Church in Illinois, will present one of the main evening addresses.

Katie Funk Wiebe contributed a chapter from an American-Mennonite perspective to a recently published text book, The Ethnic American Woman: Problems, Protests, Lifestyle, edited by Edith Blicksilver, (publisher--Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Roswell, Georgia). Her chapter, "The Barriers Are Not Real", focuses on the difficulties of a Mennonite woman in entering the publishing field.

The Report is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church And Society. Correspondence should be sent to Gayle Gerber Kooztz, 27 Fairlawn St., Everett, MA 02149.

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